WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE SO CALLED "BLACK SPLASH"

DISEASE OF HIBISCUS

H. N. Miller and Erdman West

Several years ago our attention was called to a condition on hibiscus which seemed to be causing some concern.

Characteristic symptoms consisted of elongated, black spots on the young stems and black irregular spots on the leaves. Lower leaves were generally affected first. Affected leaves turned yellow and fell from the plant. However, definite areas of the leaves might remain green even after the leaves had fallen. In early stages of the problem, only the bark on the stems was affected. The wood was not affected. Numerous other symptoms, such as sloughing of the bark from the stems and roots, death of the new shoots, and decline and death of the plants may be associated with "black splash". It is not definitely known whether these symptoms are a further development of the same problem or whether they are due to some other cause. These latter symptoms may occur as a result of poor nutrition, water logged soils and or heavy infestations of the root knot nematode, and are seen many times when the typical symptoms of "black splash" are not present.

When the first specimens of "black splash" were picked up, attempts were made to isolate a disease producing organism from the affected material but without success. Repeated attempts, from time to time, have been made to isolate such an organism. At one time cultures of the fungus Phomopsis were obtained. Attempts to infect hibiscus using the standard procedures have failed.

On the basis of the above work and on field observations it does not appear that this condition is caused by an organism. There does not seem to be any evidence that it is being spread around through propagation or by pruning operations. In our experience the symptoms of "black splash" are most commonly found on plants showing evidence of poor growing conditions. Plants growing on excessively drained, light sands and which are not given sufficient fertilizer and are not watered during periods of drought are more apt to have "black splash". The condition is seldom seen in a nursery where the plants receive optimum care.

Since we do not know the exact cause of "black splash", no corrective measures can be given. Pruning out affected wood and improving the growing conditions should be helpful. The need for a fungicide is not indicated. Further work is being done at this station to establish the exact cause of "black splash".....Florida Agricultural Station, University of Florida, Gainsville, Florida.

The above article, which we solicited from Dr. H. N. Miller and Dr. Erdman West, is presented in the interest of clarifying the controversy regarding "Black Splash" disease. This disease was reported as being a serious threat to the growth of hibiscus. Through our own observations, we believed that the threats of this disease had been somewhat magnified. This article appears to confirm our beliefs. Our thanks are hereby extended to the Plant Pathology Department of the University of Florida and the above mentioned professors for this invaluable help.

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